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ABSTRACT   This paper attempts to explore the role of creativity in counseling. Since counseling aims at helping clients solve their problems it is obvious that it involves decision making. Deciding is at the heart of helping and the process through which one arrives at a decision regarding the solution of his/her problem proceeds through logical thinking and the emotional satisfaction acquired from the decision taken. The thinking part of counseling refers to the logical procedure used to find solutions to problems. The feeling part of counseling refers to the emotional process that underlies problem solving and which may be described as creativity since it includes imagination and spontaneity. Counseling is firstly examined in relation to cognition. Brief reference is made to some information-processing theoretical views which help explain how people go about trying to solve their problems. Then, creativity is defined and examined in relation to the counseling process. The position taken is that therapeutic counseling strives towards facilitating and assisting clients in producing creative solutions to their problems. A three-stage model of counseling is proposed to help explain the facilitative approach to creative thinking and problem-solving. Training counseling techniques aiming at increasing the client's creative ability are proposed at the end of the article.

Key words: Cognition, counseling, creativity

Introduction

One of the reasons why people seek psychological help is that they make poor decisions. Deciding is at the heart of helping. Decision making in a broad sense is the same as problem solving. Counseling has been repeatedly conceptualized as helping clients solve problems (e.g., D'Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971; Krumboltz, 1965; Urban & Ford, 1971; Weitz, 1984). Fretz (1981) repeated that counseling aims to increase clients' ability to solve problems and make decisions.

Logic and creativity interplay in the decisional process. In order to solve a problem one needs first of all to think things through logically and then to test the ideas he/she generated to see if they work. This is the first step towards the solution of a problem. The second step involves the emotional satisfaction one gets from the decision he/she has made. It is obvious that even the most rational decisions will be unsatisfactory if the person does not feel good about them. Decisions are not just rational, they are also deeply linked to emotions. This is where creativity comes in in decision making. Creativity may be described as a primarily emotional process that underlies decision making. In counseling, clients are helped to generate something new through logical thinking, imagination, feelings, and spontaneity; that is, through logic and creativity.

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Counseling and cognition

In counseling, we are usually confronted with a severely disturbed relationship between the individual and his/her environment. Our task is to improve this relationship by increasing the correspondence between the structure of the environment and the person's inner representations. We have to understand the relationship between reality, inner processes and action -*thinking, feeling and doing,* the classic triad of client behavior to be considered in counseling. Doing is the behavioral outcome of changes in thinking and feeling, the inner processes. Some important questions to be answered when one contemplates how clients attempt to solve their problems and how counselors will be able to facilitate the problem-solving process, have to do with a systematic examination of how clients process information, their knowledge bases, and their attempts to regulate their cognitions, affect and behavior. In other words, to examine how clients take in information, process that information into plans for solution to personal problems and carry out those plans. A better conceptualization of the client and his/her cognitive processes as he/she attempts to solve personal problems will lead to more focused assessment and more focused interventions.

There are many views on how people process information, such as those of Newell & Simon (1972), Hunt (1971), Minsky (1975) and Anderson (1980) among others. They all stress that people are constantly processing information in various ways, so that they can respond to their environment and achieve relevant goals. Emphasizing the cognitive structures, Neisser (1976) proposes that perception is a circular activity which he calls the «perceptual cycle». He postulates anticipatory schemata «that prepare the perceiver to accept certain kinds of information rather than others and thus control the activity of looking» (p. 20). The schema directs the explorative behavior which samples information from the object, and the schema is modified in itself through the incoming information. The perceiver accepts certain kinds of information rather than others and thus controls the activity of looking and perceiving. The «perceptual cycle» helps us to understand the relationship between reality, inner processes and action. Piaget's notions of assimilation and accomodation are quite similar to Neisser's notion of the perceptual cycle.

Another line of thought, which was developed in the field of psychology and which is nearer to psychotherapy and counseling, stems from Kelly's theory of personal constructs. Constructs are ways in which we organize experiences in terms of similarities and differences and they are based upon our previous experiences. «A person lives his life by reaching out for what comes next and the only channels he has for reaching are the personal constructions he is able to place upon what may actually be happening» (Kelly, 1955, p. 228). Thus, the individual uses previous experiences to create hypotheses about the possible occurrences of new outcomes in his/her effort to maximize the accuracy of his/her views and, therefore, his/her control over the environment. Kelly (Maher, 1969) stresses the point that behavior is more or less controlled by one's personal constructs. The person puts questions to the environment asking for information which does or does not confirm the activated construct.

Adopting any of these theories counseling psychologists can develop their problem-solving framework for the counseling process. Since the goal of counseling is to help clients solve problems, counseling psychologists are in a unique position to examine the real-life problem-solving process in counseling. The first step in this examination involves exploration of the conditions which hinder the normal relationship between the individual and his/her environment. The counselor and the counselee become engaged in exploratory behavior. The task of the counselor is to give the client the opportunity to explore those areas which he/she could not explore in the past or which he/she could not explore thoroughly enough. Through this process the client is helped to clarify issues in terms of

specific experiences, behaviors and emotions and then try to manage them through constructive change. This demands willingness, commitment to change.

Willingness and commitment to change requires intentionality. «The person who acts with intentionality has a sense of capability. He or she can generate new behaviors in a given situation and approach a problem from different points of view» (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Downing, 1987, p. 10). Intentionality involves creativity - the willingness to take new perspectives, generate new behaviors and find new meanings in old situations.

Creativity

Creativity or creative thinking has preoccupied social scientists for quite some time. Questions such as: «What is creative thinking and how can it be promoted?» « Is it a skill or is it a cognitive process?» «Is it a human charisma or can one be trained for it?» «Which factors define it and how can it be reinforced?», have been answered in several different ways. The relevant research literature seems to indicate that creative thinking may be defined in three different ways:

a. as the kind of thought leading to creative products;

b. as the process through which problem-solving may be reached; and

c. as the ability which can be measured through performance in specific types of work (Barron & Harrington, 1981).

Piaget describes the mechanism of creativity as the primary circular reaction, the active repeating of results that were first achieved by chance (Piaget, 1963; Gallagher & Reid, 1981). Chance variation in behavior or thought is basic to creativity. However, discovering new thoughts and behaviors through chance is not enough. A child learning a new skill or a client learning a new behavior needs to repeat it actively and with conscious intent to reinforce and maintain it.

A broad and generally accepted definition stresses creative thinking in different fields and activities: «Creativity is the combination of thoughts, ideas and answers in a new-original way» (Munford & Gustafson, 1988). Creative thinking can thus be encountered in different fields of human capacity: researchers, artists, writers, scientists, but also housewives may produce new but effective solutions to the challenges they face.

Characteristics. One of the factors which has been found to be related directly to creativity is *divergent thinking* which is the ability of generating unusual but suitable answers to questions or problems (Guilford & Hoepfner, 1971). Divergent thinking is characterized by flexibility and assumes that there is always more than one answer. In terms of counseling this means more than one way to manage a problem or develop an opportunity. Another ingredient of creativity is *cognitive complexity,* the ability of the individual to differentiate the behavior of others and to interpret events in multiple ways. Cognitive complexity is characterized by tolerance towards ambiguity and uncertainties, a fondness for novel situations and a preference for diversity (Heist & Yonge, 1968). The tolerance of ambiguity component of cognitive complexity has been a prominent variable associated with effective counseling in both theoretical writings (Bordin, 1955; Stone & Shertzer, 1963) and research investigations (Brams, 1961; Gruberg, 1969). Other components necessary to creativity involve: *expertise* (in depth knowledge) in the field of endeavor, which is directly related to what a person has learned, what he/she knows about the realm of his/her efforts; *persistence* at problem solving; and *motivation* to pursue a creative production of a new, original approach to the problem area (Amabile, 1989; Amabile, Hennessey, & Grossman, 1986).

Factors influencing creativity. Several different factors, personal and/or social, affect the creative ability of the human mind, other times reinforcing it and others hindering it. These factors can be found in the different cognitive processes -such as thought, perception, language-, in the personality characteristics, as well as in several other social factors.

In so far as the *cognitive processes* are concerned, cognitive psychologists find that people have little or no control over their previous experiences. What we know, what we have experienced, what we believe about ourselves, affects the creative process. Certain properties of objects, people and ideas which we have learned and through which we identify them may limit our creative process. These are some of the obstacles to the development of creartivity; we are limited by our own personal ideas, experiences, and previous knowledge. Also, the way in which people understand and use the language may influence the creative process, at times constraining it, at others allowing for mutual understanding which may lead to creative thinking, since creative thinking is also a change in the way the person faces older concepts from a new perspective.

Human creativity is influenced by our social networks. D. K. Simonton (Freiberg, 1995) used historiometric methods to investigate *social influences on creativity.* He found that mentors and role models play a major role in the development of creative talent. People need to be exposed to creativity at an early age or else «they often don't find what their talent is or they find it too late». When they become adults, creative people thrive best if they are surrounded by lots of other creative people, Simonton says. Similar findings have been reported by K. Dunbar on the role of creativity in the labs (Freiberg, 1995). It seems then that it is mainly the stimulation they get from other creative people surrounding them which influences their own creative thinking. This should not be misinterpreted as imitation. It must be emphasized that if the individual is following, conforming, imitating, being like others, his/her growth as a creative self will be impaired (Tumin, 1954). «To the degree that the individual strives to attain a similarity or congruity, to the degree that she/he acts in order to be popular, to be victorious, or to be approved of, and to the degree that she/he models her/himself after another person, she/he fails to emerge as a self, fails to develop her/his unique identity, fails to

grow as a creative being consistent with her/his own desires and capacities and consisitent with a life of genuine relatedness to others» (Moustakas, 1967, p. 41).

Another social factor influencing creativity is the *enthusiasm* with which one works on a specific topic or area. It has been found that people unsatisfied with their work are hindered in their creative thinking. In contrast, when motivated primarily by the satisfaction and the challenge of the work itself, they become more creative.

In so far as the *personality characteristics* of creative people are concerned, there are no clear and conclusive findings. Creative people seem to be more independent, rely more on intuitive thinking, and have higher self-acceptance and energy (Baron & Harrington, 1981). Trying to outline the creative personality that emerges in counseling, Cole & Sarnoff (1980) and Robertshaw, Mecca, & Rerick (1978, pp. 118-120) agree on: *optimism and confidence, acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty, a wide range of interests, flexibility, tolerance of complexity, verbal fluency, curiosity, drive and persistence, independence, nonconformity or reasonable risk taking.*

The creative process in counseling

Many parallels exist between creativity and counseling. All therapeutic approaches strive towards creating with their clients new ways of thinking and feeling about issues, thus helping them in their problem-solving process. Carl Rogers saw the job of the therapist being to facilitate client creativity (Rogers, 1961, ch. 19). Rollo May (1975) assisted many people in producing creative solutions to a pressing life problem through counseling and psychotherapy. Gestalt therapy (Perls, 1969), transactional analysis (Berne, 1961), rational-emotive therapy (Ellis, 1973), Kanfer's cognitive restructuring notion (Kanfer, 1982; Kanfer & Goldstein, 1975), all of them initiate rational cognitive processes

leading to divergent thoughts and emotions. Diversity in thinking and feeling is often the basis for solving a personal problem. One of the earliest therapeutic techniques, free association (Freud, 1943), was a form of divergent thinking which increased the likelihood of a creative solution.

A person seeking counseling usually faces a difficult personal problem which oftentimes is followed by painful feelings. The counselor must help him/her find a solution to this problem through some change in his/her behavior. The client has to commit him/herself to change. This requires intentionality, the willingness to generate new behaviors, take new perspectives, find a new meaning in old situations; in other words, it requires creativity. How can the client be helped to awaken his/her creative abilities?

Based on Carkhuff's (1972) earlier work, Egan (1994) developed a three-stage model of counseling which facilitates the creative process. The first stage he calls *exploration* stage. Exploration of the problem area is facilitated through empathy, attentive listening, and open-ended questions. The second stage of helping involves *self-understanding* through self-

disclosure. When the client is helped to explore his/her problem in depth, he/she is likely to understand it and him/herself better. The role of the counselor is to assist the client in making some kind of sense out of the many pieces of his/her puzzle, to have a light bulb go on - the «aha» or the «eureka» experience - which will lead to some insight.

The final goal of *helping* -the third stage of counseling- is to get the client to act upon her/his understanding. The therapist helps the client in seeing the different alternatives to the solution of her/his problem and assists her/him in choosing the best course of action to correct the identified problem. In generating creative alternatives, persons are encouraged to suspend or defer judgment about the value of the ideas that come to mind. After many alternatives have been generated, they can be judged in terms of their value on many criteria so as to choose the most appropriate or effective. Several techniques have been developed that lead to an attitude of deferred judgment, including lateral thinking (deBono, 1970), synectics (Gordon, 1961), checklists (Osborn, 1953), forced relationships
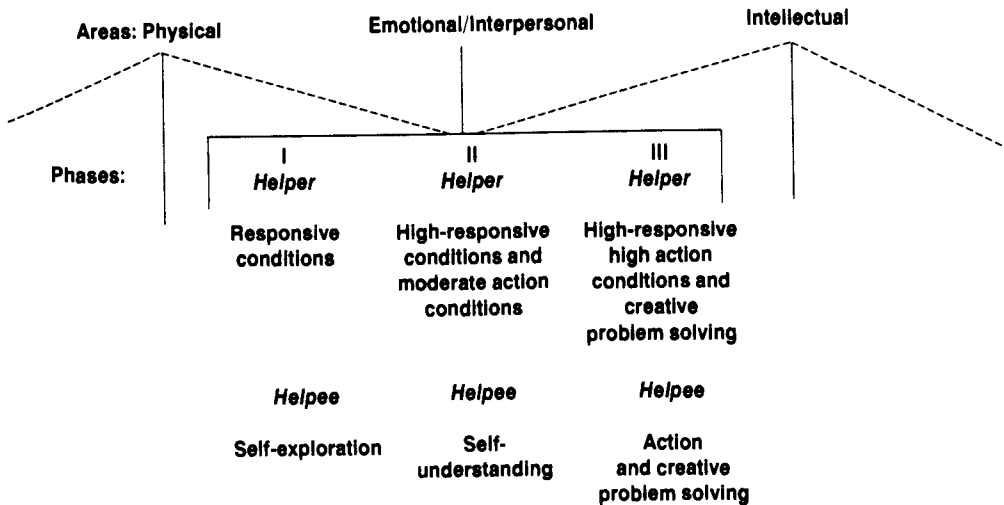

Figure 1
Areas and phases of helping

and attribute listing (Parnes, 1976); an idea is recorded and processed regardless how «wrong» it seems to be. This increases by many magnitudes the number of available cognitive elements.

The action itself provides the ultimate feedback to the client; feedback from action stimulates further exploration, more accurate understanding and more effective action and improved outcome. Exploration, understanding, and action (as shown in Figure 1) constitute the ultimate goal of helping which is learning and carrying the counseling process into the later stages of creativity.

The activities of counselors and their clients are largely concerned with thinking up alternative solutions to problems and then thinking judgmentally about the probable effectiveness of specific solutions to particular problems.

Fostering creative thinking in counseling. How can creative thinking be fostered in counseling? Creativity can be fostered if certain internal and external conditions exist. Starting with the internal or the personal conditions of the person, Carl Rogers (1961) identified at least three: (a) *openness to experience.* «This means that instead of perceiving in predetermined categories the individual is aware of this existential moment as it is, thus being alive to many experiences which fall outside the usual categories» (p. 353). It means lack of rigidity, tolerance for ambiguity; (b) *an internal locus of evaluation.* «The value of his product is, for the creative person, established not by the praise or criticism of others, but by himself» (p. 354); (c) *the ability to toy with elements and concepts* «to juggle elements into impossible juxtapositions, to shape wild hypotheses, to make the given problematic, to express the ridiculous, to translate from one form to another, to transform into improbable equivalents» (p. 355). To these three conditions we may add *motivation,* since most people create primarily because it gives them personal pleasure and satisfaction.

The external conditions which will foster and nourish the above-described internal conditions include, first of all, the three basic variables, set forth by Rogers, which are thought to be «necessary and sufficient» conditions in a helping relationship. That is: a) empathic understanding, b) genuineness, and c) unconditional positive regard. Through *empathy* the therapist senses the client's private world as if it were his/her own. *Unconditional positive regard* refers to the therapist's caring about his/her client no matter what the client is experiencing or expressing. *Genuineness* means that the therapist is freely and deeply him/herself. With these three basic conditions clients feel free to express their thoughts and feelings, thus permitting their real self to emerge and «to express itself in varied and novel formings as it relates to the world. This is the basic fostering of creativity» (Rogers, 1961, p. 358).

Creativity training counseling techniques. An important goal of the counseling process is to increase the creative ability of the counselee so that she/he will be armed to adapt in new and original ways to her/his constantly and rapidly changing environment. Through the exploratory activity of the creative process in counseling, the individual acquires schemata which can sample more and more information from the environment and guide better and better adapted actions towards it. Through self-disclosure the client is led to self-understanding and insight; that is, she/he acquires the ability to see the many different aspects of her/his behavior and personality and develops a deeper understanding of those areas of dysfunctioning in which she/he evidences a lack of understanding. Depth reflections and interpretations call for deeper levels of exploration and awareness on the part of the helpee. The action part of the counseling process provides a path for overcoming the obstacles and achieving higher levels of functioning. When the helpee can achieve even minimal levels of self-understanding in a given problem area she/he shows the need to learn to act upon this understanding and the helper can introduce some action-oriented dimensions, such as confrontation, reframing or good questioning and listening skills to help her/him reorganize her/his old structures of behaving and thinking, generate alternative solutions to her/his problem

and ultimately find a more effective and creative way of being in the world.

Some of the techniques which help toward this direction include: (a) *role playing,* which helps the person to learn more about other people's characteristics allowing him/her at the same time to experiment with new behaviors. Many people who don't think they are creative, discover their creative potential through role playing. Role playing works primarily in the personality area, in the sense that it loosens blocks or inhibitions, helping at the same time the individual to assume more constructive personality characteristics (Stein, 1975); (b) *muscle relaxation,* which helps the client overcome anxiety provoking obstacles which block his/her creative thinking; (c) *divergent thinking,* which means training to think that there are more than one ways to manage a problem or develop an opportunity; (d) *brainstorming,* which is an idea-stimulation technique for exploring the elements of complex situations and develop possibilities for better ways of accomplishing goals; (e) *suspended judgment,* that is, teaching the clients not to criticize the ideas they are generating. Other techniques that may achieve similar results include meditation, biofeedback, and visualizations.

Conclusion

Counseling involves cognitive and affective operations. The balance between thought and emotion is important for personal effectiveness as well as for creative productivity. The counselor can help the client in facilitating such a balance, by being aware of the creative process within the client, by using creativity training techniques, by teaching the client paradigms for the creative process, and by modeling use of the client's own creativity. Warmth, genuineness, and empathy on the part of the counselor are highly important in building a good relationship; without them not much can happen. However, a good and accurate conceptualization of how clients attempt to regulate their affective responses as well as the

cognitive and behavioral processes when attempting to solve personal problems will lead to more focused assessment and more focused interventions.

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